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**University of Bath**

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**Displacements of Memory:  
Struggles Against the Erosion and Dislocation of the Material Record of  
Violence in Burundi**

Andrea Purdeková

**Abstract.** The paper investigates unofficial commemoration practices, interaction with sites of memory and the fate of materiality of memory – mass gravesites and their remains— in the context of Burundi’s stalled transitional justice process. The focus lies on post-war spaces where material remnants of a violent past struggle against new layers of developmental, infrastructural build-up and political disincentive. The paper explores three concrete sites of violence in Burundi as these confront different forms of erasure and displacement of memory ranging from physical removal, misplacement of remains to symbolic delinkage. In the process, the paper revisits notions of the public secret, the labor of the negative and truth as revelation. The paper closes with reflections on the latest developments and concretely whether the establishment in 2014 of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission spells a decisive break with the past.

**Key words:** commemoration, sites of violence, exhumation, transitional justice, Burundi

**Introduction: Commemoration in Transition?**

“Truth is not a matter of exposure of the secret, but a revelation that does justice to it.”

- Walter Benjamin

Much has been written about contexts where transitional justice processes and commemoration are ongoing, and about the nature and politics of memory unfolding therein. The current paper instead investigates unofficial commemoration practices, interaction with sites of memory and the fate of materiality of memory—mass grave sites and their remains— in the absence of a functioning, official transitional justice mechanism. The paper takes as its case study Burundi, a country with one of the longest-

running public silences on a violent past.<sup>1</sup> The central query of the paper is as follows: How has the politics of silence on the past translated into space, shaping the physical record of violence, and how has it transformed over time, especially in the post-war period characterized neither by open suppression nor overt action on the past?

Uniquely, the paper approaches its topic through the lens of materiality of memory. There is a profound gap in the literature on this topic with existing transitional justice debates revolving predominantly around public preferences for justice versus forgiveness and silence on the past, or alternatively local conflict resolution mechanisms.<sup>2</sup> Yet materiality can provide not only a fresh but also an extremely useful perspective on the ways in which memory, commemoration and power interlock after war. Within this broader nexus, the paper specifically explores the local post-war struggles against the erasure and displacement of memory as reflected in the ways in which the material remnants of a violent past struggle against new layers of developmental, infrastructural build-up and political disincentive. While such practices of obliteration-through-development have been documented through human reports in many regions including Latin America, Asia and Africa, there is a striking absence of academic analysis..

The story of transitional justice in Burundi is one of absence before and during the civil war, and one of a political deadlock thereafter. After the war, active suppression of memory has given in to an ostensibly supported but politically fraught and stalled

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<sup>1</sup> The public inaction and silence in Burundi is a notably prolonged one, spanning more than five decades of political violence from independence in 1962 to much after the end of the civil war (1993-2003), we could argue up till today.

<sup>2</sup> See Cyrus Samii, 'Who Wants to Forgive and Forget? Transitional Justice Preferences in Post-War Burundi,' *Journal of Peace Research* 50, 2 (2009):219-233; Bert Ingelaere, 'Living Together Again. The Expectations of Transitional Justice in Burundi- A View From Below,' *IOB Working Paper* (2009); Peter Uvin and Ann Nee, 'Justice, Silence and Social Capital', 145-171 in Peter Uvin, Ed, *Life After Violence: A Peoples' Story of Burundi*, (New York: Zed Books, 2009); Bert Ingelaere and Dominik Kohlhagen (2012) 'Situating Social Imaginaries in Transitional Justice: The *Bushingantahe* in Burundi,' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, 1 (2012):40-59.

process of transitional justice.<sup>3</sup> What has emerged is a 'good enough peace' coupled with a 'rhetorical adherence to a global transitional justice paradigm'.<sup>4</sup> The deadlock on the past has to do with the careful power sharing between elites all of whom are implicated in the past of violence.<sup>5</sup>

The political deadlock has translated into the sphere of public commemoration as well. Burundi remains outside the 'global rush to commemorate atrocities,'<sup>6</sup> the 'flourishing "monument phenomenon."' <sup>7</sup> The study here thus bypasses the burgeoning literature on the politics of museums, memorial and public statuary, and the controversies over memory where commemoration has been launched after war and genocide.<sup>8</sup> The situation in Burundi contrasts starkly with neighboring Rwanda for example where the government has erected didactic memorials of the *jenocide*, and where the landscape is dotted with memorials and the year with commemorative events.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The basis of the transitional justice mechanisms has been laid in the 2000 Arusha Accord. But because key negotiations with belligerents continued after this date (2003 and 2009), implementation was postponed and subject to political negotiations. National Consultations finally took place in 2009, and a draft law on a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was prepared and went through various transformations in 2011 and 2012. Finally, in 2014, the law was passed and the Commission established.

<sup>4</sup> Vandeginste (2016:4&9).

<sup>5</sup> The 1972 Hutu genocide perpetrated by the UPRONA government was later accompanied by massacres perpetrated by all factions to the 1993-2003 civil war.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Sabine Marchall, *Landscape of Memory. Commemorative monuments, memorials and public statuary in post-apartheid South-Africa*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> See Elisabeth King, 'Memory Controversies in Post-Genocide Rwanda: Implications for Peacebuilding,' *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 3,6 (2010); Rachel Ibreck, 'The politics of mourning: Survivor contributions to memorials in post-genocide Rwanda,' *Memory Studies* 3,4 (2010); Shannon Davis and Jacky Bowring, 'Connecting with Tragedy Through Landscapes of Memory: Memorial Design, Tourism, and the Post-Genocide Memoryscapes of Cambodia, Rwanda, and Germany,' *Memory Connection* 1,1 (2011)

<sup>9</sup> This is not to mean that silence and invisibility are not present in Rwanda. The multiple Tutsi remains on display contrast with the hidden and buried, unmarked and unrecognized remains of Hutu victims of violence during the 1990-1994 civil war and after.

On the other hand, Burundi's story is not quite one of 'absent monuments'<sup>10</sup> either and the paper takes care in comparing sites of violence that differ markedly in terms of demarcation and commemoration. In other words, there are levels to silence and recognition, amount of commemorative practice or resistance in Burundi today and in the past. To foreground this gradation, and using Kenneth Foote's typology,<sup>11</sup> the paper will consider a 'designated' site (clearly marked as a space of memory) under direct threat of obliteration from above, a 'rectified' site (one returned to its prior use without sign or ceremony) demanding designation from below, and an 'obliterated' site, the result of indirect effacement, never marked and now to be turned into private use. Despite the differences, the paper will demonstrate and explain how in all three spaces memory is under threat of suppression. As will be shown, after the war people struggle against a more multifaceted and ambiguous attack on the past, glanced here through the dislodging of the material indexes of violence – memorials, memorial graveyards and victims' remains.

To structure its analysis, the paper deploys and revisits the notions of the public secret, the labor of the negative and truth as revelation. In his book *Defacement*,<sup>12</sup> and based on long-term research among Colombian communities affected by violence, Michael Taussig offers us incisive analytical tools with which to trace the workings of memory suppression in contexts such as Burundi.<sup>13</sup> For Taussig, whose definitions serve here as starting points, public secret and the labor of the negative refer to 'negative knowledge' or to the practice of 'knowing what not to know.' Public secret is that which is 'generally

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<sup>10</sup> Laleh Khalili, 'Absent Monuments and Appropriated Memory Spaces: Palestinian Commemorative Spaces in Lebanon,' (2004), <http://www.newschool.edu/nssr/historymatters/papers/LalehKhalili.pdf?referer=www.clickfind.com.au>

<sup>11</sup> See Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

known but cannot be articulated.’<sup>14</sup> Reversing the Foucauldian accent on knowledge as power, Taussig brings our attention to power through public oblivion or disarticulation.

But we need to push Taussig further. If in its broadest sense ‘labor of the negative’ points to effacement of memory, then we must acknowledge there are modulations in its form. While ‘knowing what not to know’ was indeed key to power of Burundi’s regimes prior to the end of the war and the dominant form of memory erosion, the labor of effacing the past has transformed and diversified so that there are multiple labors of negative at play today and these do not necessarily depend on negative knowledge. From dense suppression of the past under the one-party ethnocracy, erosion of memory proceeds under an ostensible political consent to a process of public retrieval and recognition. The past is instead threatened by the lack of its *de facto* protection and articulation. In the post-war period, the labor of the negative thus manifests in more subtle forms that have to do with physical and symbolic (dis)placement of remains and indirect obliteration. But do such forms cease to produce power as the ability to proceed ‘as if not’ and the desired state of impunity?

To demonstrate the changing nature of the labors of the negative, the paper traces three sites as these confront different forms of memory erosion ranging from physical disposal of remains (at hill Zege), misplacement of remains (at Kiviyuka), to symbolic delinkage (at Bugendana).. Importantly, in none of these cases is public secret the main motor of memory’s erosion. In neither case do power and meaning reside in the act and fact of public exposure. Rather than simply seeing, showing, knowing, what matters from a local perspective is representing and acknowledging in particular forms and spaces. Thus if there is one running line throughout the paper, it must be Walter

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5.

Benjamin's observation that truth is not a 'matter of exposure of the secret, but a revelation that does justice to it.'<sup>15</sup>

The methodology underlying this paper is qualitative and grounded in the perspectives of ordinary Burundians. The fieldwork for this research was conducted between 2013 and 2015 in the provinces of Gitega, Bubanza and Bujumbura. The methodology is qualitative and ethnographic and combines a number of data-gathering techniques. In addition to semi-structured interviews with rural Burundians and civil society representatives, the research also draws and informal exchanges and observation in all sites and memorials discussed, as well as primary and secondary materials. The longer-term scope of the project allowed for repeated visits to a number of sites and follow-up interviews with some of the key participants.

### **Histories of silence and informal commemoration**

The memory-scape in Burundi has been 'a politicized milieu' throughout its history.<sup>16</sup> Across more than five decades and despite the war's end, a structure of silence and impunity has continued to undermine a public project of commemoration. As a result, commemorative initiatives have been privatized, informal and hidden. Despite this broad continuity, we can distinguish between four distinct phases of memory practice during Burundi's independent period. The first phase, just after independence in the 1960s, saw construction of monuments to heroes and dignitaries as was common elsewhere in the early nation-building period. Even during this time, politically motivated killings were present, though these were not discussed in public. There were no major civilian casualties.

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<sup>15</sup> quoted in Taussig, *supra* n 3 at 8.

<sup>16</sup> See Aloys Batungwanayo and Benjamin Vanderlick, 'Lieux de Mémoire: Commemorative Initiatives and Memorials to Burundi's Conflicts: Invisible and Permanent Memories,' *Impunity Watch* (2012).

The situation changed dramatically in the 1970s. A short-lived Hutu rebellion in 1972 brought on a brutal repression by the state against all educated Hutu, classed by Lemarchand as a 'selective genocide'.<sup>17</sup> The mass casualties were hidden from view, the bodies disappeared and dumped into mass graves. The victims of the violence were officially labeled enemies of the state (*abamenja*). A complete public silence on the events was imposed: 'The Micombero regime, together with its administrative cadres, police and informers, watched this carefully. One ambiguous word, even a veiled criticism, could result in summons to the authorities, a fine, imprisonment without charge or worse, a disappearance'.<sup>18</sup> The *imprudences de langage* (careless expression) came at a cost. In line with the code of silence, commemoration was forbidden. 'After 1972, families were forbidden to mourn, to organize their traditional rites (*imigirwa*), the mourning and close of mourning ceremonies (*kugandara* and *kuganduka*).'<sup>19</sup>

Importantly, even in this climate of suppression during the 1970s, commemoration did not disappear but was performed privately and unofficially. But it was only decades later that the Hutu began 'testing the limits of the possible' in the public sphere.<sup>20</sup> The repertoire included 'the shaving of heads to commemorate the 1972 carnage, peaceful demonstrations and not-so-peaceful private altercations.'<sup>21</sup> A large demonstration was organized in 1991 in the province of Cibitoke to commemorate the 1972 victims. 'What is significant about this public display of solidarity is that it happened at all. ...This was the first time in 25 years that Barundi, most of them peasants, were able to peacefully

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<sup>17</sup> René Lemarchand and David Martin, *Selective Genocide in Burundi* (London: Minority Rights, 1974); René Lemarchand, 'Genocide in the Great Lakes: Which Genocide? Whose Genocide?' *African Studies Review* 41, 1 (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Jean-Pierre Chrétien and Jean-Francois Dupaquier, *Burundi 1972, Au bord des génocides* (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 465.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Thacien Keshimana at CENAP, July 11, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> René Lemarchand, *Burundi: Ethnic Conflict and Genocide*. New ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 148.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.



express demands, which the authorities had previously silenced.’<sup>22</sup> This was nonetheless a very narrow window of opening. The demonstration happened shortly before the civil war would erode such spaces of possibility.

During this period, memory work was also very much alive and intensified in the space of exile where it was freed from the constraints of a repressive regime.<sup>23</sup> Tanzanian refugee camps where Hutu survivors gathered in hundreds of thousands were especially intense in reflection and in production of a Hutu political consciousness, historicity and historical narratives.

The third phase of memory practice started in the 1990s during the civil war (1993-2003), which of course produced its own landscape of violence. During this period, commemorative initiatives were selectively ‘approved by successive governments, who demonstrated great propensity for memorialisation when their own responsibility was not engaged.’<sup>24</sup> These initiatives were nonetheless few and far between. A clear political motivation and ethnic profiling defined the few memory ‘markers’ that appeared. While Tutsi victims of massacres such as that in Bugendana could be memorialized, Hutu victims of government massacres such as those in Kiviyuka were not.

Over time then, there was a gradual shift from ‘celebrating “great men” to commemoration of civilian casualties’ but the latter tendency was politically inflected, partial, and minimal in scope.<sup>25</sup> The civil war has also created a competitive victimhood model, and what Lemarchand deplored as ‘ethnicised memory.’<sup>26</sup> In line with this, the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.,150.

<sup>23</sup> See Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press,1995).

<sup>24</sup> Vanderlick and Batungwanayo, supra n 22 at 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Rene Lemarchand, ‘Le génocide de 1972 au Burundi: les silences de l’histoire,’ *Cahiers d’études africaines* 42, 167 (2002):551-67.

war period saw the construction of 'monument-cemeteries restricted to one massacre and one ethnic group.'<sup>27</sup> It still remains difficult to unwork this legacy despite recent attempts at creating cross-victim association platforms such as CARAVI.

The last phase of memory practice can be dated to the 2000 Arusha Peace Agreement, which has made a number of provisions for transitional justice<sup>28</sup> and a few on commemoration more specifically.<sup>29</sup> But the progress has been stalled and politicized. Justice mechanisms have been completely sidelined, and a widely criticized TRC draft law was only passed in 2014. The new TRC was finally established just ahead of the controversial 2015 elections and the last section will critically question whether this event spells a major shift in the dynamics observed in this paper.

The post-war prevarication from above has been met with a greater push from below. But the work of local associations has been directly frustrated by the government. Ceremonies have been subject to government authorization and rarely granted. The government has systematically denied requests for registration of associations, for exhumations and 'end of mourning' ceremonies. The public silence on the past has thus continued, despite an overt change of course and a rhetorical commitment to a truth and reconciliation process.

To this day then there has been no proper reckoning with decades of a violent past, and the challenges here are hard to overstate. The 1972 genocide and the decade-long civil war have produced a massive material record of private pain and public oblivion.

Civilians were targeted by all belligerent parties and most areas of Burundi were

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<sup>27</sup> Vanderlick and Batungwanayo, *supra* n 23 at 30.

<sup>28</sup> Specifically, Chapter II calls for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Article 8) and a Judicial Commission of Inquiry (Article 18). The full text is available here: <https://www.issafrica.org/cdburundipeaceagreements/No%201%20arusha.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Article 6 of the Accord for example calls for the erection of a national monument in memory of all victims of the genocide.

affected by guerrilla-instigated or counter-insurgency violence. As a result, around half a million victims and hundreds of sites of violence are yet to receive any form of meaningful redress and recognition.

### **Displacements of Memory: Contested Sites and the Clash of Materialities**

How have people been marking and commemorating atrocity in the absence of a public process and how successful have they been in counter-acting the forces of suppression or erasure? How does negation of memory proceed in the new circumstances of a post-war state hovering in the twilight zone of outward commitment coupled with lack of meaningful action? Analysis of concrete sites and remains of violence is a useful way of tackling these questions. The current paper explores three such sites, each with a different history and politics surrounding commemoration. As will be shown, though all three sites face either clearance or displacement of 'what remains,' in each case the labor of the negative proceeds in a slightly different way. We will see actual physical effacement (the case of Zege), threatened symbolic erasure through delinkage (Bugendana) and exposure without recognition, a limbo of memory (Kiviyuka). The victims and their representatives have been resisting such moves, with different degrees of involvement and success.

In a country populated by hundreds of mass graves, why have these three been chosen? The cases presented here are both representative of wider dynamics in Burundi and capture the *variation* within a theme, the many faces of a single dynamic. In other words, there are 'myriad similar events' to those studied here whereby 'the experience of violence and its enduring aftermath are broadly shared by many other communities.'<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> David Taylor, 'Under the Avocado Trees. Local Needs and Burundi's TRC: Whither the Truth?', *The Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, 3 (2013), p.451

But there are also fine nuances in this broader dynamic and it is the aim of the article to capture this.

All three sites contain the violent remains of a particular period— the civil war. This is because the earlier phase of violence in 1972 was quite distinct— people were removed from their home localities and disappeared, buried in a small number of mass graves. The civil war on the other hand was the epoch that really proliferated sites of killing, both because of its protracted nature and the nature of the violence (insurgency and counter-insurgency tactics spanning Burundi and both targeting civilians). The sites were local, opening histories of both suppression and informal interaction, which are of interest here.

**a. The Spectre of Displacement: Plans for Airport Construction over Bugendana IDP site, Gitega.**

The Bugendana IDP site-turned informal settlement dates back to the start of the Burundian civil war in 1993. It lies in central Burundi, an hour's drive from the city of Gitega and has approximately a thousand inhabitants, the vast majority of whom are Tutsi. The inhabitants are refusing to leave the site despite the sustained pressures from the government to remove them.

The site is unique in a number of ways. First, it is not only a site of those 'chased' from their hills during the violence of the early 1990s, targeting specifically the Tutsi in retaliation for the killing of the first Hutu democratically-elected President in 1993. A massacre also happened directly on the site in July 1996, which claimed the lives of between 300-600 IDPs. People vividly recall the details of the massacre. At daybreak, an *ibitero* (an attack group) of about a thousand Hutu men attacked the IDP camp from different directions. The attackers were commanded by the CNDD-FDD rebel group, one

of the key Hutu militias fighting the government at the time, and now the dominant party in power. The dozen militaries guarding the camp were easily defeated, and the *ibitero* went on a killing rampage across the site.

As a result of these dramatic events, the Bugendana space exudes a power rarely observed elsewhere. The past has a very strong affective presence in the lives of its inhabitants and comes pouring in from their accounts with urgency and immediacy of a lived present. The materiality of the site itself aids in this process. The informal settlement spreads around a cemetery and monument for the victims— a large wooden cross with a memorial inscription. Herein then lies the second point of uniqueness— in contrast to most other sites of violence in Burundi, Bugendana’s massacre has been marked and commemorated, with annual commemorations taking place since the violent events of 1996.

The ability to kindle, preserve and inscribe memory into space in Bugendana can be explained by the politics of the time. Bugendana’s were Tutsi victims at the time when Tutsi were in power. The ability to commemorate was of course partial. As shown in the next section, all but silence has dominated the space of another massacre perpetrated around the same time and of the same magnitude, though this time at the hands of the government. Bugendana nonetheless saw a reversal of fates after the war when the embattled Tutsi-led government entered into a complex power-sharing agreement with Hutu groups and other small Tutsi parties. The perpetrators of the massacre were now in power, achieving ever increasing political dominance over time.<sup>31</sup> This then marks another point of uniqueness of the Bugendana site—those in power see the site and the memorial as an undesirable reminder, an index of their own imbrication in violence.

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<sup>31</sup> Stef Vandeginste, ‘Power-sharing as a Fragile Safety Valve in Times of Electoral Turmoil: The Costs and Benefits of Burundi’s 2010 Elections’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 49, 2 (2011):315-335.

During my first visit in 2013, I wanted to gather the inhabitants' perspectives on transitional justice. Nonetheless, people seemed thoroughly consumed with another matter— the alleged pressures they faced to disperse from the site and the threats made by the government to clear the location, including the cemetery and the memorial. The dispersal was to be undertaken in the name of development of the area— the construction of a local airport. In a stark contrast to the case of Kivvyuka (discussed next) where human remains were 'accidentally' unearthed during construction work, in Bugendana infrastructural development directly threatened to displace both people and memory by delinking them from place.

The labor of the negative thus proceeded differently in Bugendana than in the two other cases where actual physical delinkage and displacement has already occurred. People in Bugendana were haunted by the spectre and intimations of removal. Interviewee after interviewee impressed on me their unwillingness to be moved from the site and return 'home' to their hills of origin. In a situation where perpetrators went unpunished, the inhabitants felt their security was in danger. The threats and rumors of removal created a powerful state of anxiety and insecurity on the site, resurrecting the traumas of the past. The threats of re-development thus exacted their own form of violence. The labor of the negative showed the extent of its potency – much before being executed, and whether or not executed in the final moment, it was already productive in the present.

The fate of the cemetery was of key concern, besides the issue of security in spaces of return on the hills. 'Before they remove us, they have to show us where they take ours (the buried victims of the massacre). Because if the cemetery stays here, it is a way to destroy evidence of what they did. We won't leave until they show us where they are taking ours.' A local administrator outside the settlement confirmed the re-

development plan.<sup>32</sup> Despite his admission that one of the reasons people want to stay at the site is to 'be close to those they lost in the massacre', he said the removal should not be a problem since it is lawful 'to move cemeteries.' A process of delinkage was at play.

When I came back in April 2015, the Bugendana site and its inhabitants were still there, but so were the lingering fears of displacement and the talk of the airport. The word had it that *abazungu* (white people) came in February 2015 to assess the area for construction. Others said that the CNDD-FDD held a meeting in the commune recently where 'they told the population [their supporters] that if they elected them in 2015, this project of the airport would be concretized.' Another man recounted the same: 'They told the population this Sunday that this airport they have been waiting so long for is coming now, they can testify.' And yet, whether the airport plans were mere threats, or whether these were real plans that might indeed materialize, they were already productive in their mere potentiality. 'This idea of airport' made people feel 'powerless' and 'afraid,' a young man explained.

The threats of re-development and (re)displacement produced a dense transcript of mistrust towards the state and its motives. Though the official reasons for dispersal were beneficent, people questioned such projections of state benevolence. Many suspected 'hidden agendas' were at play: 'It is true,' the informal *chef de site* suggested, 'there is a government's program to destroy the site...It is not only this site, if you heard [about] Mutaho, Ruhohoro. They are trying to destroy all the [IDP] sites and then invent unrealistic projects like here – an international airport. But we realized this was just a way to threaten us.' 'I don't think there is any [development] project,' a young girl, a supervisor in the local secondary school concluded, 'It is just a political project, to take us out of here.' 'Some among the officials, some who will talk to you privately, they

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with the Social Advisor to the Makaba villagisation site, July 22, 2013.

would say “To be honest, we want you to leave because of the massacres, it is kind of a reminder, we want these massacres to be forgotten,” two young men told us. In people’s minds then, development served a number of purposes at once, being a threat to some, a promise to others. Political reasons of silencing the past were usefully married to political promises to CNDD-FDD supporters in the surrounding communities ahead of the 2015 elections.

In Bugendana, the labor of the negative proceeds in a slightly different way from its typical understanding as ‘active not knowing’ of a violent past, the not-daring to state the obvious. The ‘law of silence’<sup>33</sup> does not hold up in this space, which if anything is unique in the active presence of the past, voiced and marked, etched onto the landscape in the form of the memorial and regular commemoration. But Bugendana also shows that exposure is insufficient if it is not coupled with a public system of recognition and protection. We are reminded, as we are with all the different cases, that it is not the exposure of the secret that matters but the type of revelation that does justice to it. The physical reminders at Bugendana are there but they are still lying in a space of precarity. The Bugendana inhabitants are vulnerable as they hold no titles to the land, the site is government-owned. It is this precarity, the real potentiality of delinkage and erasure, that shows where power lies, rather than the law of silence as Taussig would have it. It is not public secrecy, but public lack of a protective legal structure that creates the ability for the government to proceed ‘as if not.’ The clash of materialities – the undesirable and transient settlement pitched against the desirable and substantial infrastructural development – underlines the vulnerability not only of the site, the inhabitants and their cemetery, but the fragility of memory as it is threatened with physical decoupling from place *through* which it is remembered.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Taussig, *supra* n 3 at 6.

<sup>34</sup> Filippucci ‘accords great centrality to the materiality of place, arguing that past violence is remembered *in* the places of violence because it is remembered *through* them.’ Quoted in:



**b. Exposure Without Revelation, The Limbo of Remains Unearthed: Road Construction in Zone Kivyuka, Commune Musigati, Province Bubanza.**

Burundi's landscape of memory does not reflect 'a' form of labor of the negative but many. The Kivyuka site provides here an interesting contrasting case to that of Bugendana. The settlement lies in the northern province of Bubanza and is a site of mass killing also dating back to the civil war. The mass graves here, however, have never been officially marked.

On May 3, 1996, a vividly remembered massacre of (mostly) Hutu civilians was perpetrated by the army at the local marketplace. This was a Hutu rebel stronghold during the war and the massacre was a retaliation for rebels' repeated destruction of electricity pylons in the area. It was a coffee season and a market day but the market remained empty precisely because of intimations of what might come. The local administrator took the megaphone and called the population to gather in the marketplace in order to deliver a 'security message.' After he retreated, the military surrounded the place, threw a grenade and opened fire on the gathering, killing approximately 350 people in the process.

The perpetrators—the military—came back days after the massacre to remove the victims and place them into purpose-made mass graves nearby. They were not thorough in their work and some of the victims' remained buried under the marketplace. The place fell into disuse but 'long after, the administration persuaded the population to use

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Nicolas Argenti and Katharina Schramm, *Remembering Violence: Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission*, (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 25.

the same place as a market,' citing lack of alternatives.<sup>35</sup> The market of Kiviyuka is then where the ordinary and extraordinary come to a transgressive interplay. In the context of an enforced silence on the past, a public secret was literally stepped right over, etched into space through the mundane re-use coupled with public silence. The public memory proceeded 'as if not' and demonstrated the sort of power Taussig spoke about (though no longer, as will be shown).

The Kiviyuka case poses a stark contrast to Bugendana. In Bugendana, both the people and the remains of victims of the massacre are facing displacement from a site that is suffused in memory to an extent unparalleled in Kiviyuka. The Bugendana burial place is separated out and marked with a commemorative cross whereas Kiviyuka's victims were never accorded such recognition. But whereas Bugendana's inhabitants live continuously with the fear and threat of displacement, it is in Kiviyuka where remains were actually unearthed in the process of road construction.

While the Kiviyuka massacre also took place during the civil war in the 1990s, the constellation of actors was very different. The victims were principally Hutu and the perpetrators the former Tutsi-dominated government. The indiscriminate killing in the marketplace was a counter-insurgency tactic and a retributive act against the actions of the then-rebels and now dominant party CNDD-FDD. Today, the area lies in the stronghold of the CNDD-FDD party. People here spoke openly of supporting the government in the upcoming elections, and as opposed to the inhabitants of Bugendana— who spoke fearfully about the intentions of the President and his government— people here referred to Nkurunziza intimately as 'President Peter.'

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<sup>35</sup> The market was recently relocated and 'upgraded' but remains in close vicinity of the old site. Interview with an employee at Kiviyuka's Secondary School, April 2015.

But this sort of positioning of the victims as the martyrs of the previous regime has not made post-war recognition any easier. Because of the dynamics highlighted in previous sections, public silence on the past has dominated and defined the space of the Kivvyuka massacre before the end of the civil war, but even after. In conformity with the findings of Cyrus Samii, Kivvyuka actually lies in the zone of the strongest preference for silence on the past.<sup>36</sup> As a local activist and relative of a massacre victim frustratingly admits, local people say '*agapfuye kabazwa ivu*, meaning "ask the earth about the dead" ... they are done, finished.' A woman farmer on the hill just above the market place confirmed this: 'We consider that these things are gone, they have passed.' Interestingly then, the Hutu victims of the deposed Tutsi-dominated government find it no easier to gain recognition of the crime, mark the site, or to commemorate under a regime that fought for their very political emancipation.

'Why is there such a resistance towards commemoration and unearthing of graves?' I asked a local activist. 'This is a land of mass graves...it becomes an embarrassing question for the government. [It sets a precedent:] If they do it for Kivvyuka, voices will rise everywhere. This partially explains it. There is also bad faith, lack of will.' The impunity alliance is certainly to blame. The top officials responsible are still in the government, and the CNDD-FDD party would risk undermining the careful power-sharing accord if it chose partial justice.

Impunity has certainly reigned over the events: 'The local administrator who gave the message [in the market] is dead, but even then he was known as *Ndakaravye* [I washed my hands of this]. The captain who was the commander during the events is alive and has been promoted to colonel in the army. The commander of the army in the commune

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<sup>36</sup> Samii, *supra* n 2.

at the time is alive and in the army.’<sup>37</sup> This reflects a much broader documented phenomenon whereby ‘members of former Burundian army (Forces Armées Burundaises) continue to hold positions of power.’<sup>38</sup>

‘Nobody, no single authority came after [the massacre] to deliver a message [*ijambo ryihumure*—a message of hope, to say sorry],’ tells me Charles Mokoto, the then head of the local victims’ association. It was only ‘in 2010, during the electoral campaign that the President of the Senate came and emphasized that the government will unearth the remains and bury them with dignity. Nothing has happened since.’<sup>39</sup>

The local *Association de Victimes de Kivyuka* was formed in 2010 as the first institutional vehicle to represent the victims and their families. The association was the first to raise concerns about road construction in the area, gathered names of victims, and attempted annual commemorations. The struggles of the association are telling in highlighting the political nature of commemoration, even in a political stronghold area. The association was refused national registration and could only register locally. In 2012, the administration refused permission for a mass to be held at the site. But a form of unofficial commemoration still took place<sup>40</sup> and continues to do so annually.

Kivyuka would likely be little known were it not for a powerful controversy related to post-war development and its direct threat to the gravesites. Namely, a brand-new Bubanza-Ndora road was projected to run through the middle of Kivyuka village, cutting through the gravesites. In 2011, facing pressure from the association, the company agreed to bypass the graves but works restarted in 2012. In 2013, human remains dating to the 1996 massacre were unearthed in the marketplace. A quick exhumation

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Charles Mokoto, Bujumbura, July 2013.

<sup>38</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), ‘Burundi: Seek Justice for War Crimes Victims’, 2009.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Charles Mokoto, *supra* n 48.

<sup>40</sup> Including the laying of flowers, three minutes of silence and a silent prayer.

ensued and partial remains of about six people were hastily wrapped up in holding banners and placed in eleven wooden boxes without care or ceremony. The exhumation was overseen by local administrators, without the presence, knowledge of or consultation with survivors or the police.

When people in Kivvyuka narrate the 1995 massacre, they paint a clear and detailed picture of many eyes set on the cover-up actions of the government— they vividly invoke the making of a public secret. What features prominently in their narratives is the image of the bulldozer and the truck (*camion benne*), a set of powerful machines coming from outside their community and bound on a technical task, representing the state's systematic and out-in-the open task of mass management of materiality. Arriving days after the massacre, the bulldozers uncovered the bodies from the shallow graves in the marketplace and dumped them into two or three mass graves nearby where they have stayed ever since, with no official marker or trace. Heavy rains would at times resurface pieces of remains from their resting place. Horrific as the killing itself was, the manner of treatment added to the trauma.

The direct implements— the machinery of violence— today re-emerges as machinery of development, but importantly one that doubles as machinery of a more subtle, symbolic violence as well (as in involved in attacks on memory and dignity, personal and group rather than physical integrity). The 2013 Kivvyuka events were a parallel and a reversal of history at once. Foreign bulldozers and trucks were coming again from outside people's community, but this time in the context of (at least official) peace and in the name of infrastructural development and integration. But what remained was the careless surfacing of the earth, now proceeding not in name of direct repression, but rather indirectly, in a context of a missing framework for safeguarding and protecting unearthed remains and memory more broadly.

Importantly, it is not so much the exposure of the remains (as in the unveiling of a public secret) that aroused local outrage but rather their undignified treatment (as in the type of revelation). The construction company Sogea-Satom allegedly wanted to dispose of the remains 'along with the dust.' The administrators proposed an alternative— to bury the remains in the local cemetery. The victims' association protested. Those exhumed did not die natural deaths and this recognition needed to be inscribed into space, it required a spatial separation and demarcation. To the association, both options represented a continued labor of the negative, an erasure not of the remains' materiality, but of their status and memory, them as proof and index to a 'painful past.'<sup>41</sup>

The (dis)placement of the remains mattered, just as it did in Kivyuka. Here too the labor of the negative was constituted through their misplacement and the resulting delinkage. But unlike in Bugendana, the delinkage in Kivyuka was not from a place through which the events were properly remembered. The struggle in a sense was an anterior one, it was ontological at heart as it concerned the very designation and demarcation of proper place where these remains should rest. Kivyuka saw repeated delinkage of its remains from an appropriate form and space of remembrance, first in form of mass graves during the civil war, and later in the form of either proposed disposal or relocation to an unmarked site after the war.

In the end, the exhumed remains were salvaged for an uncertain future. They were placed apart and are currently stored at a local secondary school. There is no sign marking their presence. In a very symbolic gesture, only the local administrator (*chef de zone*) holds the keys to the room. The association's ultimate objective is official

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<sup>41</sup> Iwacu, 'Kivyuka, Bubanza: Exhumations en l'absence des familles des victims,' Iwacu, 09/07/2013, <http://fr.africatime.com/burundi/articles/kivyuka-bubanza-exhumations-en-labsence-des-familles-des-victimes> (accessed March 3,2016).

commemoration, dignified reburial, and importantly, preservation of the remains to serve as proof of past events. Nonetheless the status of the remains remains that of limbo. During my visit in 2015, two years after their exhumation, the coffins still remained locked with no plans for reburial or memorial construction. In my last communication with the local association in April 2016, there was no progress on the issue. With the massacres unaddressed and unacknowledged in the first place, this is for many a double erasure from history.

In conclusion, the Kivyuka site presents a powerful show of the displacements of memory and removal of remains and the past in the name of development. A local activist admitted that ‘the road is necessary because the area is isolated.’<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, and in reference to the urgency of the road construction, the head of AMEPCI highlighted that development should not be done ‘by flouting the most basic rights.’ The families of victims felt profoundly disappointed with the act, which only produced *meffiance* (distrust) of the government. After all, the people buried here were ‘martyrs of the CNDD-FDD,’ the dominant party, dying in response to their actions during the civil war. Testimonies repeatedly highlight the exact phrase of the communal administrator Gratien Ruriryanino that unequivocally tied the gathered people to the fate of the rebels: ‘Uwishinze inamujandi yajanye nawe’ (if you follow the renegade, you share their fate). Now, paradoxically, the same people are suffering further violence, symbolic violence from the very actors that were meant to symbolize change. After six years of activism in a government stronghold area, the unearthed Kivyuka remains rest unceremoniously behind locked doors without the slightest sign marking their presence.

### **c. The Tragedy of Lesser Crimes: Urban Development on Hill Zege, city of Gitega.**

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Charles Mokoto, supra n 48.

The final short contrasting case is the hill Zege on the outskirts of Gitega in central Burundi. This is an example of a labor of the negative in the most literal sense as physical effacement of the past. In 2015, the hill was cleared for the construction of a brand new urban quarter. In the process of construction work, human remains of men, women and children were unearthed, but these were subsequently left lying on the cleared earth in open view. Zege was a mixed burial ground. During the civil war, the local population used the site as a cemetery but the government and the rebels also used to bury on the site, possibly commingling remains and histories of natural and unnatural death.

The very blunt exposure of human remains during construction activated no protection measures and only very little media attention. The only action taken by the local administration was to, via the churches, invite people who have buried their relatives there to relocate them elsewhere. This privatised displacement of remains has proven all but unviable as most graves were unmarked, and people claimed that the relocation should be the task of the government.<sup>43</sup> When the construction unearthed the remains in early 2015, there was no local organization present to mount protest and to protect the remains. The newly established Truth and Reconciliation Commission visited the area but failed to act. The whereabouts of the remains are unlikely to be properly established, the undignified removal reversed, and the truth of their past unlikely to be established.

Hill Zege is be the story of many other minor sites of killing and un-identified graves where labor of the negative proceeds without any special premeditation and without much resistance. It represents the frictionless happenstance of new build-up and infrastructure rewriting the landscape, performing its clearances and turning the past into disposable rubble. Just the previous year, in November 2014, construction around

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<sup>43</sup> Impunity Watch (IW), 'Sincerity of Burundi's Commitment to Transitional Justice under Scrutiny as TRC Commissioners Sworn In,' *Impunity Watch Policy Brief* (December 2014)



the Bururi prison led to similar accidental unearthing, without any procedure for proper treatment, protection or reburial. It is also likely that the 'lesser sites' will escape the attention of an overwhelmed commission, if and when it commences its work.

### **What Remains: Clearance and Displacement of Memory After the War**

What remains? This is a pertinent question—what are the material traces, the marks, the crosses, the maps and archives, the indications of past violence inscribed into Burundi's post-war landscape? Where are the remains of five decades of political violence defined by disappearance, disposal in mass graves, and an enforced silence? What and where is the physical record able to 'register memory for future accountability'?<sup>44</sup>

Our case studies have brought this record to stark relief. Burundi's landscape is in fact 'replete with traces of violence, but these traces are largely hidden beneath the surface.'<sup>45</sup> On April 30, 2014, Burundian civil society group AMEPCI-Gira Ubuntu announced to have identified almost 500 mass graves only of the 1972 victims.<sup>46</sup> Yet a decade after the end of the war, there is still no official mapping of mass graves in Burundi. Mass gravesites are often unmarked and almost always highly politicized.<sup>47</sup>

The continued lack of public recognition and protection of civilian sites of massacre in Burundi has important repercussions but as we have seen, it does not mean these sites have not been revisited, reconstituted, untended. Many have become part of everyday life as markets, toiled fields, courtyards or environs of public institutions. In some

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<sup>44</sup> Werbner, *supra* n 15 at 1.

<sup>45</sup> Vanderlick and Batungwanayo, *supra* n 22 at 4.

<sup>46</sup> <http://burundi-agnews.org/genocide/burundi-genocide-1972-pres-de-500-fosses-communes-identifiees/> (accessed on March 2, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Vanderlick and Batungwanayo, *supra* n 22 at 4

instances, local communities have erected memorials, organized informal commemoration and/or struggled for official recognition. The preceding sections offered a fine-grained look at such local-level action and struggle over the tracing and making of a mark over that which remains.

Equally importantly, the case studies demonstrated the ways in which the labor of the negative has actually transformed and proceeded post-war. The indexes to the past that do exist in the landscape are being eroded in multiple and perhaps more insidious ways. Importantly, such labor is not always the result of a purposeful plan, but rather often the result of the lack of any protection or proper mapping mixed with political disincentives. These new, subtler dynamics are well expounded through the struggle between materialities—the threat posed to memory through the layering of build-up, whether accidental, purposeful, or merely intimated.

‘Violence leaves traces,’ writes Schramm, but so does peace building and post-war reconstruction.<sup>48</sup> Memory of violence is ‘inscribed onto space’ but so are efforts at post-war integration, physical and social. The post-war space is thus where reminders of violence and objects of peace building and reconstruction intermesh, and at times clash. By focusing on interaction and layering, the study differs from literature focused squarely on violence’s traces or the affective states created by these.<sup>49</sup> The focus lies instead on the physical and affective geography produced through layering materiality created during transition in the name of development and integration on the side or on top of materiality produced by war. As shown, new layers of materiality – redevelopment of urban neighborhoods, erection of large development projects, extension of road infrastructure— have been exacting their own compensations vis-à-

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<sup>48</sup> Katharina Schramm, ‘Landscapes of Violence: Memory and Sacred Space (Introduction),’ *History and Memory* 23, 1 (2011):5.

<sup>49</sup> See Yael Navarro-Yashin, *The Make-Believe Space: Affective Geography in a Postwar Polity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012); also Schramm, see supra n 42.

vis the past, threatening to displace or overwrite memory as embedded in the physical record.

The clash of materialities demonstrates quite well the subtle labors of the negative that we see at play today. One of the broader techniques is ‘delinkage’— the displacement and disconnect of either commemoration activities or human remains from their spatial, symbolic and temporal referents. The requests to change dates of commemoration, names of organizations, or the resting place of victims’ remains (the focus here)— precisely the linkages that bear most meaning— act to erase the symbolic charge and present forms of symbolic violence. They downgrade memory from a meaningful form of revelation to (often literally) bare-bones exposure.

Erasure, overwriting and misplacement of memory arising from redevelopment are perhaps the starkest manifestations of these new post-war dynamics. They demonstrate the careless and undignified removal of remains resulting from new material build-up coupled with lack of protection and recognition. But there is a longer history to this practice, and two strains of strategy emerge— purposeful erasure, and the inevitable overwriting due to lack of protections and provisions. Already during the 1972 genocide, large infrastructure was layered atop mass graves: ‘To make disappear the proofs of the undertaking, some of these mass graves were used [became bases] for erecting public infrastructure such as was the case of Bujumbura international airport in the capital or the Institute of Agronomic and Zootechnical Research (IRAZ) in Gitega.’<sup>50</sup> Such purposeful material cover-up was accompanied by more indirect covers. Multiple smaller burial sites became claimed by agriculture. People came to toil atop graves. Today, the clash of material build-ups provides a disturbing parallel to the past, though it perhaps proceeds in more indirect ways.

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<sup>50</sup>See: [http://www.arib.info/Conference\\_internationale\\_genocide\\_1972\\_Communique\\_presse\\_09a\\_vril2014.pdf](http://www.arib.info/Conference_internationale_genocide_1972_Communique_presse_09a_vril2014.pdf) (accessed March 15, 2016).

The cases of Bugendana, Kivvyuka and Zege analyzed above show the many faces of the subtle erasure of memory at play today. Yet despite differences, each case upholds the Benjaminian dictum on truth. It is not ultimately exposure that matters— and in each case we indeed see powerful exposures, whether in the form of actual material proof, the resurfacing of human remains of violence, or more indirect but no less powerful physical indexes and markers on the body and the landscape, or in the form of voice and resurgent memory. Instead, it is the type of revelation that is key. Indeed from the viewpoint of the local communities, it is the very nature of revelation and treatment of the resurfaced past that is a bone of contention and a source of grievance. Drawing on the rich texture of these examples, we can see how exposure without appropriate revelation can consolidate rather than undermine the labor of the negative, and can produce symbolic violence through its attack on dignity and its manufacture of denial.

## **5. The 2014 Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A Decisive Break with the Past?**

In 2014, we have witnessed what could be interpreted as a breakthrough in Burundi's transitional justice process. On December 4, the Burundian parliament elected the eleven commissioners that would form the new Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). But does the establishment of the TRC signal a decisive break with the past? Is it a sign that the dynamics we have reviewed above will be reversed? There are a number of reasons why we need to be cautious with our optimism. The TRC has been politicized and compromised since its inception, and the recent political crisis (April 2015-) has made any meaningful progress difficult. What we witness in Burundi is an ongoing and entrenched system of impunity buttressed by a lack of political will to deal with the past and the recent crisis-related abuses.

First, the TRC is perceived as an institution lacking independence and one over which the dominant party retains control.<sup>51</sup> The mandate of the commission has been widely criticized by both domestic and external actors as it fails to reflect key preferences arising from the 2009 National Consultations on transitional justice.<sup>52</sup> Second, the new TRC was installed just before a controversial election has plunged the country into an ongoing political crisis, in which the state is again implicated in a violent and repressive way. The Commission has officially been in its preparatory stage, but it appears stranded by the political deadlock, with little detectable activity..’

Third, the TRC mandate is expansive when compared to other Commissions such as those of Sierra Leone and South Africa.<sup>53</sup> Among its objectives, the TRC sets out to ‘identify and exhume all mass graves’ and is expected to ‘take measures to protect them and to allow for exhumations and reburials.’<sup>54</sup> The immensity of the task coupled with the factors mentioned above makes this proposition unlikely. Instead, the Commission will likely have to be selective in its approach.<sup>55</sup>

Last but not least, other continuities persist, and namely that unmarked mass graves are being produced again. The recent political crisis has created its own layers of grievance, killings and disappearance.<sup>56</sup> There are reasons to believe that the existing system of impunity will be extended to cover these crimes through the application, yet

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<sup>51</sup> Impunity Watch, *supra* n 54 at 3.

<sup>52</sup> Such as the inclusion of civil society in the TRC and the mixed composition of the commission. *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> David Taylor, ‘Truth Under the Avocado Trees. Local Needs and Burundi’s TRC: Wither the Truth?’, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, 3 (2013):450-470.

<sup>54</sup> Vandeginste, *supra* n 13 at 362.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.

<sup>56</sup> It is estimated that over 400 people have been killed during the crisis, with ‘some 595 people ill-treated or tortured [in detention] since April 2015.’ See United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, ‘Torture and illegal detention on the rise in Burundi,’ April 18, 2016, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=19835&LangID=E#thash.Rn7VaR5G.dpuf> (accessed April 20, 2016).

again, of *immunité provisoire*.<sup>57</sup> These recent violations nonetheless fall outside the TRC's mandate, which covers events between 1962-2008. A set of paradoxes thus unfolds. First, the recent events clearly show that the past the TRC aims to deal with is far from a past. And yet second, the recent events come to fully overshadow that long past.

A quick google search on 'exhumation of victims of violence in Burundi' returns page after page of recent press coverage, revolving around events in and around Bujumbura on December 11, 2015 when more than 80 people were 'systematically' killed and disappeared in response to an attack on military installations in what became one of the most violent days of the ongoing crisis.<sup>58</sup> In January 2016, Amnesty International has claimed evidence of mass graves in Buringa on the outskirts of Bujumbura, allegedly dating to the December 2015 crackdown.<sup>59</sup> Satellite imagery and video recordings were used to buttress witness accounts and now populate the internet.<sup>60</sup>

In all of this coverage nonetheless, there is not a single reference to a long past of violence and a landscape filled with gravesites. Yet the past literally repeats itself in the method and machinery of contemporary violence—disappearance and the truck. The hallmarks of the 1972 genocide re-emerge. Victim's families are unable to trace, retrieve and bury their dead. Something else gets replayed in real time too— the practice of the public secret— knowing what not to know, signaling a return to a repressive treatment of political violence. We could thus argue that a new commemorative phase is being

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<sup>57</sup> Vandeginste supra n 5.

<sup>58</sup> For details see: Al Jazeera, 'Burundi Accused of Systematic Killings in Capital,' December 22, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/burundi-accused-systematic-killings-capital-151222090152823.html> (accessed January 14, 2016).

<sup>59</sup> See Amnesty International (AI) 'Burundi: Satellite Evidence Supports Witness Accounts of Mass Graves,' January 28, 2016, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2016/01/burundi-satellite-evidence-supports-witness-accounts-of-mass-graves/> (accessed March 15, 2016).

<sup>60</sup> The UN is investigating reports of nine other mass graves and two cemeteries where bodies of victims were allegedly buried.

forged, one eerily reminiscent of the second phase discussed above whereby all violence is carefully suppressed. The graves are not a mystery and witnesses exist but they do not speak out because ‘the policemen who were there that day intimidated them.’ ‘It is a *secret* between us and the commune [emphasis added],’ suggested one of the employees of the municipality.<sup>61</sup> The world knows too and pays attention. Nonetheless, it does so without placing the latest disappeared into the larger historical context and without taking any meaningful action. This poses the pressing question of what sort of truth is indeed being built in the international public— one of exposure of the secret (even that being very partial) or a revelation that also does justice to a violent past?

## Conclusions

By way of conclusion, what can we learn about public memory, commemoration and transitional justice more broadly from a case defined by decades of deadlock and inaction on the past? First, the paper presents a unique, bottom-up excavation of the ways in which ‘compromised transitions’ actually affect memory and shape the physical record of violence. It refocuses our attention on local level struggles and the interface between unofficial and official commemorative practice. This perspective pushes us away from a focus on ‘absences’ and ‘lack’ still dominant in the literature on both Burundi and other deadlocked transitions. In turn and second, such analysis opens to view labors of the negative e— forms of effacement of the past— that differ from both cases of outright memory suppression and state-sponsored official commemoration . As shown, in Burundi a repressive strategy has given way to a proliferation of more varied and subtler labors of the negative after the war. Nonetheless the overall effect is consistent, the epochs though different mutually reinforce erasure of memory in a multiplicity of forms.

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<sup>61</sup> See: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20151230-burundi-temoins-existence-fosses-communes-presumees-attaques-casernes> (accessed March 14, 2016).

The case of Burundi also urges us to reconsider the links between public secrecy, silence and power. Taussig has invited us to look beyond forms of knowledge at forms of active not-knowing, which can be equally productive of power. Yet the cases studied here show us powerfully a different sort of labor of the negative at play— one proceeding not only through public secrets and active silences, but at times despite voice and despite a most stark exposure of the secret in the form of unearthed remains. The ability to proceed as if not, to negate the past, might no longer be the product of active suppression but rather the weight of absence, the lack of protection and procedure reflective of the broader lack of political will. In Burundi it is the real potentiality of delinkage and erasure of memory that shows where power lies, not the law of silence. The clash of materialities—those of memory and development—reveals this dynamic most clearly.

At the three different sites that we have overviewed, the inhabitants are unequivocal in arguing that what matters is the form of the material trace etched into public recognition. Physical exposure is not enough, it is the manner of revelation that alone can restore power and voice to the victims and their relations. What remains matters—it is present, it is known, and at times it is even unearthed and exposed— and yet it still remains to be revealed. For actors such as the TRC, this means that fact-finding must be coupled with a system of designation, protection and commemoration. Importantly, exposure without revelation is not simply ineffective or insufficient, it serves to produce and reproduce symbolic violence through the delinkage, displacement and mistreatment, and effacement of memory that accompany it. The future of Burundi's sites of violence is highly uncertain, compounded both by the political crisis and the nature of the Commission set up to protect them.

What can interpretive work through public secrecy and materialities teach us about post-war memory more broadly, in other divided societies and deadlocked transitional



processes? The paper expands our understanding of how memory and power interlock. It reaches beyond manufacture of official memory (forms of knowledge) and suppression witnessed through the public secret ('negative knowledge') to show that erasure of memory works through mechanisms of delinkage, displacement and disposal (despite or alongside knowledge). The materiality of memory tells this story most clearly and needs to be employed in settings not only where transitional justice stalls such as Burundi or is absent such as CAR, but also where it is present but one-sided such as in Rwanda. What happens to unmarked mass graves and *unofficial* commemorations in these spaces? It is only if we understand the full repertoire of labors of the negative in each case that we can start effectively counter-acting them. This paper has been an attempt to expand our understanding of such a repertoire, and hopefully further work will extend the analysis presented here.